DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 441 IR 008 673

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TITLE Plan for a Sign System at the Idaho State University Library.
INSTITUTION Idaho State Univ., Pocatello. University Libraries.
PUB DATE 15 Jan 80
NOTE 11p.: Appendix removed prior to filming: photographs will not reproduce.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Libraries: Higher Education: *Libraries: *Library Facilities: Library Planning: Library Standards: Orientation: *Signs: *Systems Development: User Satisfaction (Information)
IDENTIFIERS *Idaho

ABSTRACT

Emphasizing the importance of the development and maintenance of a system of signs to make the library patron aware that a reliable pattern of information exists within the library, this report includes a selection of statements excerpted from Sign Systems for Libraries, a collection of papers on visual guidance systems in various types of libraries edited by Dorothy Pollet and Peter C. Haskell (Bowker, 1979), and an outline, explanation, and list of recommendations for a proposed signage system for the Idaho State University Library. (FM)

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PLAN FOR A SIGN SYSTEM AT THE IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

BY

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IR008673

January 15, 1980

PLAN FOR A SIGN SYSTEM AT THE IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

When the library opened its doors two and a half years ago temporary signs helped to orient patrons to a new and very large building. Most of these signs were made with black felt markers and cardboard and identified offices and collections, provided directions, and gave information about library services and policies. We wanted to see what changes might be needed in a new building before creating more permanent signs. Thanks to careful planning before the move, no major changes have been necessary. It it now time to develop a coordinated plan for the use of signs in the library.

The emphasis throughout this report is on developing and maintaining a system of signs. Professionally made signs should be designed, constructed, and placed within the building in such a way that patrons perceive that a reliable pattern of information exists. In addition, such signs contribute to the standards of the library--conveying a feeling of professionalism that then extends to patron attitudes toward the collection, services, and staff.

This report includes the following: (1) A selection of statements from Sign Systems for Libraries, edited by Dorothy Pollet and Peter C. Haskell (Bowker, 1979). (2) An outline for a proposed signage system for the ISU Library, an explanation of that system, and recommendations for its implementation. (3) An appendix consisting of selected photographs from Sign Systems for Libraries which provide examples of signs mentioned in the report.

SELECTIONS FROM SYSTEMS FOR LIBRARIES

All libraries can be made legible.

Legibility: The ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern.

Signage: A systematic approach to signs and related components of the visual environment that convey information. This includes building directories, wall graphics, printed library guides, maps of the building, space arrangement, displays, and all other visual means of helping readers find and use the library.

Patrons unfamiliar with the library engage in wayfinding behavior, and this process can be either aided or frustrated by the environment they encounter.

Whenever people enter an unfamiliar environment, they experience disorientation and stress. Frustration is a result of knowing that all the necessary information is available in the library, but not knowing how to get it.

Library signage systems help to complete the process that begins with the acquiring, organizing, and storing of materials....In addition, a good guidance system sets a tone for the library, subtly conveying that it is a well-organized, efficient place.

Good systems have in common: (1) consistency (2) hierarchical arrangement of information (from general to specific) (3) updating capability (4) responsiveness to audience needs.

The focus of a guidance system should be on functions and behavior, not on walls and spaces....In the last analysis, good design will be judged by its accountability to human needs.

5-30

On an architectural scale, no structure comes closer to the maze experience than does any reasonably sized library.

The aim is to present information consisently so that people will learn to look for it in certain places, to recognize it easily, and to follow it with confidence.

OUTLINE OF PROPOSED ISU LIBRARY SIGNAGE SYSTEM

CATEGORY I IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR AREAS

A. Directories
   1. Brief building directory signs at entrance
   2. Directory and map for each level

B. Service and Collection Areas
   1. Circulation
   2. Reference
   3. Maps
   4. Documents
   5. Periodicals
   6. Index Center

CATEGORY II IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC AREAS

A. 1st Level
   1. 1 (floor number across from elevator)
   2. Library Lounge

B. 2nd Level
   1. 2 (floor number across from elevator)
   2. Circulation Librarian
   3. Rare Book Room
   4. Intermountain West Collection
   5. Return (2--at slots in Circulation counter)
   6. Campus Phone
   7. Reference Office
   8. Assistant Librarian for Readers' Services
   9. College Catalogs
   10. Braille Study Room
   11. Reserves
   12. Bibliographic Center
   13. Mail Box
   14. New Pamphlets
   15. Library Reading Lists and Guides
   16. Author/Title Catalog (1 two-sided sign, 1 side of another)
   17. Subject Catalog (1 two-sided sign, 1 side of another)
   18. Smoking Area
   19. Fire Exit Only (3)

C. 3rd Level
   1. 3 (floor number across from elevator)
   2. Browsing Room (2)
   3. Library Science Classroom
   4. Humanities Librarian
   5. Science Librarian
   6. Social Science Librarian
   7. Seminar Room (2)
   8. New Books
   9. Administrative Services
   10. Smoking Area
   11. Fire Exit Only (3)

D. 4th Level
   1. 4 (floor number across from elevator)
   2. Documents Librarian
   3. Periodicals Supervisor
   4. Interlibrary Loan

5. Computer Searching
6. Copy Service
7. Return (3--at slots in Periodicals and Documents)
8. Documents Reference
9. New Documents
10. New Periodicals
11. Smoking Area
12. Fire Exit Only (3)

CATEGORY III IDENTIFICATION OF STACK AREAS

A. Large LC letters on top of pillars
B. Stack end range cards

CATEGORY IV INFORMATION

A. 1st Level
   1. One sign in lounge: run by ASISU, eat and drink only in this room, smoking area.
B. 2nd Level
   1. Building hours (on face of Circulation counter)
   2. Food and drink confined to lounge (in entrance area)
   3. Sign concerning fines, recall, searching information
   4. Company reports information
   5. Vertical file information
C. 3rd Level
   1. One sign in Browsing Room combining all present sign information
   2. Information concerning red phone
D. 4th Level
   1. One sign for all Periodicals information (closed stacks, press buzzer for help, etc.--place above buzzer)
   2. One sign for Interlibrary Loan information, including hours
   3. One sign for Copy Service information, including hours
   4. A sign for each end of the six Index Tables giving the table number and titles of indexes
   5. One sign for all Documents information (closed stacks, press buzzer for help, etc.--place above buzzer)

CATEGORY V INSTRUCTION

A. Library Guides and Reading Lists
B. Laminated Sheets
   1. Instructions for operation of Reader/Printer (2)
   2. Instructions for operation of Slide/Cassette projector (4)
   3. Alphabet split on ends of card catalog cabinets
   4. Instructions for using Rodex (2)
   5. Organization of Map area
   6. Any instructional posters, such as one for Science Citation Index

CATEGORY VI OTHER GRAPHIC DISPLAYS

A. Question/Answer Board and display area
B. Framed maps in Map area
C. Bulletin boards: behind all counters, above all copy machines, ILL and Copy Service offices, time clock area
D. LC classification system display: 3rd level, Reference, Index Center
E. Campus posters, announcements, etc.

EXPLANATION

CATEGORY I IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR AREAS

A. Directories

1. The main entrance is a confusing area. Patrons wonder about the function of the guard station--is it for information or for checking out books? There is a wall map on the right which gives the floor lay-out of each level, but there is nothing to draw the patrons' attention to this map. It is not identified. Offices on the map are numbered but a separate directory, further on in the entrance and to the left, is needed to identify an office's function and personnel. The wall map is oriented correctly, but the orange mat makes for poor legibility. There is no indication on the map for where the patron is now standing, or even at what level.

The building map needs to be replaced with a simple directory of what collections and offices are on each level. (see Appendix, No. 1). This sign, or signs, should be large and and clearly legible and understood at a glance. Placement is important; perhaps hanging from the firedoor entrance would be most effective. The present black directory board should be removed.

2. Once patrons are directed to the desired level, a floor map on that level should identify specific areas. The present floor maps at the landings of each level share the same faults as the building map in (1.), but also have an additional flaw--they are not properly oriented. The building map faces east while the individual floor maps are directed to the south. This is confusing to many people. New floor maps for each level should be more legible, not on orange mat, should identify office functions, and oriented in an easterly direction. (see Appendix, No. 2).

B. Service and Collection Areas

1-6. (Actual wording of signs as given)

There is presently no hierarchy in the size of our signs. The size of the sign and letters for a sign directing patrons to the washroom is equal to the sign identifying Circulation. The signs requesting patrons to visit the library lounge are many times larger than either one. The Index Center has no identifying sign at all.

The six major service and collection areas should be boldly identified by large signs hanging from the ceiling. Signs should be at least four feet in length. It is important that these signs be designed and constructed by professionals in the area of graphic design. Construction material should be compatible with the architecture, decor, and overall atmosphere. Wood, for example, is not appropriate. A dark plexiglass with white lettering may be a good choice for both attractiveness and legibility. (see Appendix, No.5).

CATEGORY II IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC AREAS

A-D. (Actual wording of signs as given)

After patrons are oriented to major areas they need to locate and identify specific offices, collections, catalogs, and the like. If the map displays on each level are effective, no directional signs to these locations are needed. In addition to the map, patrons can pick up a printed Building Guide or ask at a service area for directional assistance.

Signs that identify these areas should not compete visually with the large signs identifying major areas. They should be standardized in size (length will vary with the message), typeface, spacing, layout, and placement

in the building. They should all be constructed of black plastic with white letters. There are presently five signs in the building already in this format: above the Archives door, next to the A-V entrance (Audio-Visual Services), above the door leading to TS near the catalog (Technical Services), and on the walls to the left of the University Librarian's office and Associate University Librarian's office. Many of these signs are for identifying offices and should be placed above the door. Room number signs will have to be removed and then positioned directly above the identification signs. These plastic signs can be contracted through the Maintenance office.

Format exceptions: The nine Fire Exit Only signs should be red, if possible, with black letters. The double-sided signs needed for the top of each card catalog grouping should be especially prominent in size and lettering, assuring that patrons see at a glance that it is a split catalog.

CATEGORY III IDENTIFICATION OF STACK AREAS

A. Large LC letters on top of pillars

Presently there are many cardboard signs taped to pillars and stacks which indicate the call number range for the stack aisle, as well as the direction. These signs are unsightly and, in some cases, confusing. As with all cardboard signs, they tend to fall to the floor, discolor, wear, and be defaced. Individual signs are seen only when the patron reaches the aisle.

These signs should be replaced with black letters approximately 18 inches high. These letters should be of a sturdy material, possibly heavy cardboard, and attached firmly to the top of each pillar in the 3rd level stack areas and 2nd level Reference stacks.(see Appendix, No. 3). For example, the pillar to the left of the first Q range (across from the sorting room) would have the letter Q at the top on all four sides. In this fashion, patrons will quickly be able to identify a stack area from some ways off, and from any direction. The pillars to the left of a stack aisle will have the identifying LC letters for that aisle.

B. Stack end range cards

The cards in the card holders at the end of ranges should be uniformily printed. This can be done by stencil, labeler, by hand, or by some other neat and legible method. The important factor is standardization of format and figure size. Cards should all be one color. All other signs on stacks should be removed, including those that indicate use of the bottom shelves and those asking patrons not to reshelve books.

CATEGORY IV INFORMATION

A-D. (Actual wording for these signs will have to be carefully developed)

These signs do more than identify--they present information to the patron. There are presently a wide variety of these signs in the building, with different formats, methods of construction, sizes, and placements. Some of these signs are inaccurate or dated. All of them are very temporary in appearance and many show evidence of wear and defacement. Again, the emphasis is on standardization in all facets of graphic presentation. Because the messages in this category of sign may be lengthy, it is especially important that type design, size, layout, and placement be planned for optimal legibility. The same construction material and method will be used as in Category II above--black plastic with white lettering. Some may need a slot for changing messages, for example, office hours in ILL and the Copy Service. The messages for all signs must be carefully written and edited for clarity. (see Appendix, No. 6).

CATEGORY V INSTRUCTION

A. Library Guides and Reading Lists.

The series of Library Guides should be updated, when necessary, and continued with new issues. Possible topics for new Guides include audio-visual services, computer searching services, interlibrary loan services, the Inter-Mountain West Collection, and the map collection. All Guides should be prominently displayed in the entrance area, perhaps near the directory (I.A.1.), and again in the display rack across from the Reference Desk. Under the map on each level should be a display rack with those guides pertinent to the level. Maintenance has made a number of these racks.

Library reading lists should be carefully chosen for the Reference display rack. All Library Guides and displayed reading lists should be kept in adequate supply.

B. Laminated Sheets

1-6. Detailed instructions to specific library tools need to be presented clearly to the patron. These instructions should be typed or printed, protected with lamination, and prominently placed near the appropriate tool.

CATEGORY VI OTHER GRAPHIC DISPLAYS

A. Question/Answer Board and display area

The present cork squares for the "bitch board" should be replaced by an attractive bulletin board format.(see Appendix, No. 4). The present cork squares for the display area needs to be replaced by a more attractive format. The museum staff may have suggestions about this.

B. Framed maps in Map area

Attractive and special-interest maps should be framed and attractively hung in the map area. This corner is especially suitable for graphic display and could be an important visual focal point for the library.

The library's white walls, stacks, and ceiling combine with the miles of orange carpeting to produce a monotonous visual environment. A more visually pleasing environment could have some surprising benefits. The field of environmental psychology is a new and exciting one. People work and study--and learn--better if the environment is conducive to such activities. Providing visual "oasises" in the relatively stark library environment is important. Comfortable couches and chairs could be grouped with large potted plants in several locations on each level to provide relief from visual monotony and long periods of study. While not a graphic display, plants are strongly recommended for improving the livability of the building. (see Appendix, No. 5).

C. Bulletin Boards

Above each public copying machine should be a small bulletin board for the posting of information concerning operation of the machine, copyright, refunds, etc. All counter areas, the ILL office, and Copy Service have numerous notices taped to the walls. Some of these are for patrons, some for staff and student assistants. These notices may be necessary, if so, they should be confined to bulletin boards. Bulletin boards need to be placed in all of these areas; nothing should be taped to the walls.

D. LC classification system display

A useful wall graphic for the 3rd level stack area, the Reference stacks, and the Index Center would be a detailed outline of the Library of Congress classification system. The present hanging cardboard signs (mostly on coat racks) should be removed.

E. Campus posters, announcements, etc.

All campus posters, announcements, and the like should be confined to one place, preferably a large bulletin board near the main entrance. The present dividers may be sufficient for this purpose.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The proposed signage system for the ISU Library should be implemented as soon as possible. The Committee realizes that patience is needed for the planning and execution of both professional signs and signs made on campus. Quality should not be sacrificed. The Committee also recognizes that the total cost for this system may be considerable. These costs should be taken into consideration in the planning of library budgets. The cost for maintaining the system, after full implementation, should be minimal.

2. All present library signs and displays not included in the proposed signage system, and in public areas, should be taken down and discarded. Technical Services, Audio-Visual Services, and Periodical and Documents stack areas have not been included in this report, but consideration might be given to placing them within the proposed system.

3. The Committee encourages the Library to seek out signage consultants on campus and in the community. Campus resources might include the Maintenance Department, Vo-Tech Graphic Arts, the Art Department, the Architecture Department, and the Student Union.

4. The Committee recommends that a standing committee for library signage be created. This committee, working with the library administration, will be responsible for implementing and maintaining the proposed signage system. Continued maintenance of a system is vital--coordination of sign content, design, and placement must be consistent. A sign manual, or log, will be kept by this committee. No sign is to be placed in any public area of the library without first being submitted to this committee. Staff and patron in-put is to be encouraged. The committee is responsible for developing new signs, when needed, and for promptly removing or revising existing signs, when necessary.

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